

UPPER NEW RIVER WILD AND SCENIC RIVER STUDY

Summary of Eligibility and Classification Findings

December 2003

BACKGROUND

The first step in the Wild and Scenic River study process is to determine if the river or river segment in question is eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System, and if it is, to then give it a proposed classification as “wild,” “scenic,” or “recreational”. The National Park Service (NPS) released a Draft Eligibility and Classification Report for the Upper New River in August, 1994. The report was sent to interested individuals and organizations, and seven comment letters subsequently were received by NPS. With the study recently reactivated after an extended hiatus, the study team determined it would be appropriate to update and verify the information and findings in the 1994 Draft Report, taking into consideration the comments received on the Draft Report. This document summarizes the team’s updated findings regarding the study segment’s eligibility for Wild and Scenic River designation and proposed classification.

REQUIREMENTS

For a river segment to be found eligible, it must meet two criteria:

- 1) It must be *free-flowing*, i.e., free of impoundments, diversions or other significant modifications of the waterway.
- 2) The river or river corridor must possess one or more “*outstandingly remarkable values*” (ORVs). An ORV is a natural, cultural, recreational, or similar feature that is unique or especially significant when viewed from a regional or national context.

Classification depends on the segment’s relative degree of access, shoreland and instream modification, and water quality.

- “Wild” rivers are in natural or near-natural condition.
- “Recreational” rivers can exhibit a wide range of in-river and shoreland development.
- “Scenic” rivers are midway between, with some evidence of human modification but largely retaining their natural character.

STUDY AREA FOR THE UPPER NEW RIVER

- Study segment begins at the U.S. Route 460 Bridge in Glen Lyn, Virginia and ends at the maximum summer pool elevation (1410 feet above sea level) of the Bluestone Lake near Hinton, WV (10.7 miles upstream of the Bluestone Dam, or approximately 0.3 miles upstream of Steer Island).
- Study corridor limited to those lands on both sides of the river that are owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) within the Bluestone Project Area, including both lands subject to flooding and, in some cases, adjacent uplands.
- Segment length is approximately 20 miles; corridor width varies on each side of the river from less than one hundred feet to over two miles.

ELIGIBILITY OF THE UPPER NEW RIVER STUDY SEGMENT

Free-flowing Condition

- Study segment is free-flowing and riverine in appearance under most conditions; no dams, diversions, or other modifications of the waterway exist within the segment.
- Although flows in segment are influenced by releases from Claytor Dam in Virginia, they are sufficient to sustain important flow-dependent resources (such as fish and recreation).
- Occasional inundations for short durations (due to water storage in Bluestone Lake for downstream flood control) do not persist upstream of Bluestone Lake’s maximum summer pool elevation, and therefore do not preclude a free-flowing determination.

Outstandingly Remarkable Values

Scenery

- Corridor area is predominantly in a natural condition and scenic quality is high.
- Variety of near, mid, and long views; visually interesting vegetation cover and diverse landforms.
- Floodways, islands, meanders, and tributary streams add to the visual appeal.
- Distinguished from other sections of New River by the degree to which the corridor remains undeveloped, and from others streams in the region both by its large size and largely natural condition.

Fish

- One of the largest and highest quality warmwater stream fisheries in West Virginia.
- Provides high-quality habitat for numerous fish (and mussel) species.

Wildlife

- Provides habitat for several wildlife species classified as Federal Category 2 (potentially eligible for designation under the Endangered Species Act), as well as numerous game species.
- Serves as a unique natural migration corridor between the coastal plains and the interior.
- Contains an especially high concentration of neo-tropical migratory birds.
- Supports one of West Virginia's highest concentrations of eastern wild turkey.

Recreation

- Regionally significant hunting (esp. eastern wild turkey, deer, bear) and fishing (esp. bass, catfish).
- Opportunities for camping, picnicking, pleasure driving, boating, and hiking in a largely undisturbed natural environment.
- High potential for large river canoeing and canoe camping (largely unrealized at present, and limited in the region).

Geology/Hydrology

- The oldest river in the western hemisphere.
- Only river that crosses the Appalachian Range from east to west.

Archeologic and Historic Resources

- Significant crossroads for prehistoric travel and trade.
- Significant concentration of pre-historic village sites extending over a long period; high likelihood that the multiple river bottoms would qualify as National Historic Districts.
- Site of pre-Revolutionary War fort that, if located and documented, would likely qualify for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Architecturally and culturally significant mansion site at Crumps Bottom.
- Several sites of mid 18th century to late 19th century dwellings and small settlements.

Eligibility Finding: In light of its free-flowing condition and array of outstanding resource values, the entire study segment is eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

PROPOSED CLASSIFICATION OF THE UPPER NEW RIVER STUDY SEGMENT

- River is free-flowing throughout the segment with no significant alterations to the river channel.
- Shorelands are predominantly in a natural condition. Only permanent developments visible from the river are several structures at upstream end of segment (U.S. Rt. 460 bridge, power plant, other buildings) and two transmission lines (one that crosses it, another that parallels it on adjacent ridgeline for short distance). Fly ash treatment facilities in Glen Lyn, three primitive campgrounds and several agricultural leases located along the segment generally are not visible from the river.
- Access is limited to several vehicular access points and unpaved 4-wheel drive roads along the river in some places.
- Water quality fully supports Clean Water Act swimmable goal and partially supports fishable goal (elevated zinc and PCB 1254 levels in carp tissue).

Classification Finding: The study segment is most appropriate for "scenic" river classification.